

# In Thy Tent I Dwell<sup>1</sup>

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*In Thy Tent I Dwell* was first featured at the Patricia and Phillip Frost Art Museum in the spring of 2016. This art piece is an installation with a powerful message about the immigrant experience that it primarily conveys by visually narrating my family's more-than-500-year Diaspora history.

The ephemeral qualities of this installation allude to the Jewish Diaspora. The tent is a symbol of the tribal days of the ancient Israelites, the idealized domestic space of the stereotyped Wandering Jew. Therefore, *In Thy Tent I Dwell* hints at the Abrahamic covenant not only as a pact tied to constant mobility but also as heritage linked to migration and to a nomadic concept of home. To emphasize the subject of exile, *In Thy Tent I Dwell* employs a number of Hebraisms.<sup>1</sup> The first of them is the installation's title; the old English pronoun accentuates the title's biblical connotation.

Three verses from the Hebrew Scriptures have influenced me in the selection of the title. They describe the tent as a derelict place of habitation that is both dynamic and ever-changing and a private area within which protection and sanctity may be found. The first one states, "For He concealeth me in His pavilion in the day of evil; He hideth me in the covert of His tent; He lifteth me up upon a rock."<sup>2</sup> The second one states, "My tent is spoiled, and all my cords are broken; my children are gone forth of me, and they are not; there is none to stretch forth my tent any more, and to set up my curtains."<sup>3</sup> As for the third one, it states, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy

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1a. Throughout this paper, I use quotes from "Understanding the Artistic Language of Crypto-Jews," *The Journal of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Crypto-Jews* 7 (2015), 89.

1 b. Hebraism is defined as "a characteristic feature of Hebrew occurring in another language, (...) the thought, spirit, or practice characteristic of the Hebrews, (...) [or] a moral theory or emphasis attributed to the Hebrews." See *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "Hebraism," accessed 25 April, 2016.

2. Psalms 27:5 (Mechon-Mamre Hebrew-English Bible).

3. Jeremiah 10:20 (Mechon-Mamre Hebrew-English Bible).

habitations, spare not; lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes.”<sup>4</sup>

However, the lofty Biblical references of *In Thy Tent I Dwell* simply serve as the starting point for a discussion of the very human experience of immigration as the installation is the physical manifestation of a profound analysis of my heritage. Moreover, constant movement across space and time has marked that heritage.

I grew up listening to tales about part of my family's arrival in Brazil in the 1600s as Portuguese merchants with familial links to the Netherlands. This branch of the family, which settled in the backlands of northeast Brazil, preserved the stories and the accompanying cultural heritage due to its highly provincial lifestyle. Moreover, my grandmother's constant narratives about her family's migration from a territory near Seville, Spain, to a small city in the state of Sao Paulo, Brazil, at the turn of last century would freshen up of my immigrant identity immensely. In every branch of my family that I examined, there were vestiges of exile from far regions within Brazil (from the northeast to the southwest) or due to perilous voyages across the Atlantic Ocean.

My immigrant identity would one day receive even greater emphasis. At the age of 16, I would become an immigrant myself. For the next 20 years I would have first-hand experiences that often felt like déjà vu while I dealt with language, separation, adaptation, xenophobia, cultural dilemmas, assimilation, and naturalization. Altogether, these experiences would seem like modern reprises of my ancestor's narratives of expatriation.

Intrigued by my family's constant history of immigration, I engaged in a quest to understand what first sparked their invariable need to move across lands and oceans. As I ultimately found out, a single historical event led my family down the path to continual migrations, where name changes, clandestine religious practices, and an interminable process of adaptation and hybridization would be the status quo for 500 years. This historical event had to do with the Spanish and Portuguese

Inquisitions of the fifteenth century, which occurred in the Iberian Peninsula when Sephardic<sup>5</sup> Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity.

It was while I was pursuing my bachelor's degree in Latin American, Caribbean, and Iberian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (2008-2012) that I learned that hundreds of thousands of individuals<sup>6</sup> who could trace their lineages back to the Iberian Peninsula also had historical ties to the forced fifteenth-century conversions. As an artist and researcher, I found it disquieting that academia and the art world were devoting little attention to this chapter of modern history, which involved the themes of identity suppression, forced migration, and social, political, and religious persecution. It was only a matter of time before these subjects would become a prominent part of my work. After all, not only did they affect my own sense of Self to a great extent, but they also potentially revealed that a verifiable part of the largest growing minority group in the United States (which included Hispanics and Lusophones) could have descended from crypto-Jews.<sup>7</sup>

And so, since 2009, I have been working on the following two fronts: the annual publication of research articles in the peer-reviewed *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Crypto-Jews* and the

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5. The word "Sephardic" must be understood as the cultural, ethnic, and religious description of "a member of the occidental branch of European Jews settling in Spain and Portugal, and later in the Balkans, the Levant, England, the Netherlands, and the Americas... This same definition is extended to their descendants." See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Anusim," accessed April 25, 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>.

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. The relevant information follows: "About 20 percent of the current population of the Iberian Peninsula (and their descendants in the former colonies) has Sephardic Jewish ancestry, and 11 percent bear Moorish DNA signatures, a team of geneticists reports... The genetic signatures reflect the forced conversions to Christianity in the 14th and 15th centuries after Christian armies wrested Spain back from Muslim control." See "DNA study shows 20 percent of Iberian population has Jewish ancestry," *The New York Times*, December 4, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/04/world/europe/04iht-gene.4.18411385.html>.

7. Crypto-Jews are those individuals who were "compelled by overwhelming pressure, whether by physical threats, psychological stress, or economic sanctions, to abjure Judaism and adopt a different faith... [the term is applied] not only to the forced converts themselves, but also to their descendants who clandestinely cherished their Jewish faith." This definition applies to the Hebrew word *Anousim*. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Anusim," accessed 25 April, 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>.

production of artwork<sup>8</sup> that deals with immigrant heritage, with the *marrano*<sup>9</sup> and *converso*<sup>10</sup> narrative constituting a starting point for the conversation. Thus, *In Thy Tent I Dwell* emerges as a synthesis of my journal articles and artistic practice.

This synthesis takes shape through a three-dimensional tent-like structure comprising a collage on fabric of my family's documented history since the forced conversions in Spain over 500 years ago. The placing of official immigration documents, photographs, Inquisitional archives, birth certificates, and death certificates on the outside of the installation as non-linear icons provokes an unmediated experience of nostalgia. Soundscape elements, namely, murmurs of prayers, rabbinical chanting, Portuguese folk music, Spanish compositions, and Brazilian verses, emerge from the inside of the

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8 . *In Thy Tent I Dwell* is the culmination of a broad range of works in a variety of media from 2010 to 2015. More specifically, the installation stems from the many art series titled *The Journey* (comprising twenty individual two-dimensional pieces, oil and acrylics on canvas, varying in size between 4 in. by 4 in. and 48 in. by 48 in., 2015), *Exile Archetypes* (comprising nine individual three-dimensional pieces, cast aluminum sculptures, varying in size between 24 ft. to 1 ft., 2014), *The Seventh Candle* (a time-based performance depicting flamenco dancing and dealing with forced conversion, the decision to become a New-Christian Judaizer, 2015), *Crypto-Jewish Shabbat Service and Dinner* (live performance, comprising a one-on-one dinner with audience members, while chanting the Shabbat service coupled with Sephardic songs of exile, six-hour duration, 2015), *Wandering Friends in the Anthropocene* (a time-based performance collaboration between two childhood artist friends, Brazilian-American Jonatas Chimen and Brazilian-Canadian Cleber Figueiredo, who had not seen each other for over twenty years since their childhood in Brazil. They became immigrants to the U.S. and to Canada, respectively, and one day decided to meet for an unscripted performance), *Diaspora Creature* (comprising twenty individual two-dimensional pieces of mixed-media on wood panels, size 16 ft. by 24 ft., 2013); and the academic articles titled “Understanding the Artistic Language of Crypto-Jews” (*The Journal of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Crypto-Jews (JOSPIC-J)* 7 (2015), 89; published by Florida International University's School of International and Public Affairs), “The Spanish Law of Return: Between Traumas and Wonders” (*JOSPIC-J* 6 (2014), 135), “A Look Into the Early History of the Sephardic Masonic Heritage” (*JOSPIC-J* 5 (2013), 123), “The Life and Death of a Marrano Dramatist from Colonial Brazil” (*JOSPIC-J* 4 (2012), 105), “Past and Present Reflections of the Sephardic Experience in the Caribbean” (*JOSPIC-J* 3 (2011), 111), “Jewish Returnees in Brazil in 2009-2010” (*JOSPIC-J* 2 (2010), 110), and a book review, *Sephardic Genealogy-Discovering Your Sephardic Ancestors and Their World*, by Jeffrey Malka (*JOSPIC-J* 2 (2010), 168).

9. The word “*marrano*” most likely stems “from the Spanish word meaning swine or pig... intended to impart the sense of loathing conveyed by the word.” See *The Jewish Virtual Library*, s.v. “Marrano,” accessed 25 April 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>.

10. The word “*converso*” comes from the Latin *conversus*. It literally refers to individuals who were converted to the Catholic faith, either willingly or by force. See *The Jewish Virtual Library*, s.v. “Converso,” accessed 25 April 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>.

fabric tent, and one experiences auditory sensations of transgenerational exile. The sense of smell is also activated as the scent of spices emanates from the inside of the tent, alluding to the trade through which many New Christians<sup>11</sup> made a living. Through the tears in the fabric, one has a faint glimpse of the internal lights and furniture. This visual restriction is a metaphor for the secretiveness associated with crypto-Judaism. In essence, *In Thy Tent I Dwell* is a multi-sensorial installation that speaks of identity, immigration, diaspora,<sup>12</sup> and survival in the language of nostalgia.

This artistic language is not unique to *In Thy Tent I Dwell* as the installation follows a specific genealogy of works of art, by authors of crypto-Jewish and non-crypto-Jewish descent, that deal with memory, identity, nostalgia, and the overall *converso* experience. As I demonstrate below, these themes have had significant representation within the arts since the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions.

The earliest art forms to feature the forcibly-converted Iberian Jew were literature and theater. Since the 1500s, crypto-Jews have frequently been portrayed negatively—often as materialistic, disturbed, and vengeful characters. Among these characters are the iconic Shylock (from Shakespeare's play, *The Merchant of Venice* (1596)), the crypto-Jewess Dona Branca Dias (from the Brazilian play, *O Santo Inquerito* (1966), by Alfredo de Freitas Dias Gomes), Antonio Jose da Silva (from the 1995 movie, *O Judeu*, by Jom Tob Azulay), and the Borgias, the *converso* family who took over the Roman Papal seat (in Tom Fontana's TV series, *Borgia: Faith and Fear* (2011)).

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11. The term "New Christian" is "applied specifically to three groups of Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants in the Iberian Peninsula. The first group converted in the wake of the massacres in Spain in 1391 and the proselytizing fervor of the subsequent decades. The second, also in Spain, were baptized following the decree of Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492 expelling all Jews who refused to accept Christianity. The third group, in Portugal, was converted by force and royal fiat in 1497. Like the word *Conversos*, but unlike Marranos, the term New Christian carried no intrinsic pejorative connotation, but with the increasing power of the Inquisition and the growth of the concept of 'limpieza de sangre' (purity of blood), the name signaled the disabilities inevitably heaped on those who bore it." See *The Jewish Virtual Library*, s.v. "New-Christian," accessed 25 April, 2016, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>.

12. The term "Diaspora" is defined as "the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland." In the case of *In Thy Tent I Dwell*, it is used in reference to the exile of the Jewish community that lived in Spain prior to expulsion in 1492. See *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "Diaspora," accessed 25 April, 2016.

In some cases, portrayals of crypto-Jews have pointed to the relevant authors' own origins. For instance, *Don Quixote* has long been theorized to be about Cervantes (1547-1616) and his own suspected crypto-Jewish roots.<sup>13</sup> The same may be said about the legend of *El Zorro*, which is partially based on an individual named Lamport, who spent seven years in the chambers of the Mexican Inquisition then, upon escaping, plastered the city walls at night with posters denouncing the crimes of the Inquisitors.<sup>14</sup>

With regard to two-dimensional compositions on canvas, Rembrandt (1606-1669) was among the artists who contributed the most to the understanding of the multifaceted experiences of crypto-Jews. He avidly painted Portuguese exiles who migrated to Amsterdam at the end of the seventeenth century to escape the Inquisition. For instance, a well-known painting by Rembrandt is that of Manuel Dias Soeiro, also known as Rabbi Menashe ben Israel. He was born on Madeira Island in 1604 to *converso* parents who escaped the Inquisition in mainland Portugal and settled in Amsterdam as Jews in 1610. Among Rembrandt's other former crypto-Jewish sitters were the young Abigail de Pina (wife of the Marrano poet, Miguel de Barrios), the family of Daniel Levy de Barrios, Rabbi Saul Levy Morteira, Spinoza (supposedly as the model for Rembrandt's work, *The Man With the Magnifying Lens*), and the medical doctor, Efraim Bueno.<sup>15</sup> No one is certain why Rembrandt was so infatuated with the Portuguese crypto-Jews, but perhaps the narrative of escape and return and death and rebirth, known as the Phoenix of Abraham,<sup>16</sup> stimulated his artistic mind.

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13. Benjain Ivry, "The Secret Jewish History of Don Quixote-Culture," *The Forward*, February 17, 2014, <http://forward.com/culture/192662/the-secret-jewish-history-of-don-quixote/http://forward.com/culture/192662/the-secret-jewish-history-of-don-quixote/>.

14. Fabio Troncarelli, "The Man Behind the Mask of Zorro," *History Ireland* 9, no. 3 (2001), <http://www.historyireland.com/early-modern-history-1500-1700/the-man-behind-the-mask-of-zorro/>.

15. Böhm, Günter. 1973. "Judaica Ibero-Americana." Universidade de Chile. Facultad de Filosofia y Letras.

16. The Phoenix of Abraham is a symbol that became popular through the Spanish-Portuguese Jewish community of Amsterdam, who adopted it to allude to their crypto-Jewish ancestors' survival of the fires of the Inquisition (like the mythological phoenix that rises from the ashes). To this day, their "winter synagogue is... covered in a deep red carpet embroidered with a phoenix rising from the ashes, a symbol of the community which was reintroduced after World War II." See "The Historical Sanctuary

One painter whose art and personality exemplified crypto-Jewish identity was Diego Velazquez<sup>17</sup> (1599-1660). The son of the Portuguese *conversos*, João Rodrigues da Silva and Jeronima Velazquez, he spent most of his life trying to hide the impurity of his blood as he toiled towards becoming the official royal painter of Spain.<sup>18</sup> In her essay, “Velázquez and *Las Meninas*,” Madlyn Millner Kahr suggests that Velazquez's use of light in *Las Meninas* seems surprisingly confusing, perhaps alluding to his ambiguous religious heritage and social standing: “[The light] appears to be coming from slightly above horizontal center and off to the right. The face of the princess is illuminated from up and slightly to the right. But since the part in the hair of the female dwarf is illuminated, her right cheek is shadowed, and the little boy’s face is totally in shadow, the light must be coming from slightly behind the plane that the dwarf is on. But if this is the case, it is difficult to explain how the mirror in the background seems so uniformly illuminated.” Kahr reveals Velazquez's distorted self-awareness, stating that the mirror “hints at Velazquez's own unreality.”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps this, in some way, symbolizes his crypto-Jewish condition.

Another artist of *converso* descent was the painter, Jacob Camille Pissarro (1830-1903). Much of his art was, arguably, a reflection of his *marrano* heritage. Pissarro's family had originated in Portugal, where they had been hidden-Jews for 300 years. As one of the world's great Impressionists, he never once painted Jewish themes, but critics of his time insisted that his art was inevitably Jewish, “for his Jewish—as well as his provincial—background was always to play a role in his emotional make-up. They thought that his emphasis on sympathetic portrayals of poor people constituted his

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of Amsterdam’s Jews,” *The Jerusalem Post*, May 27, 2012, <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-Features/The-historical-sanctuary-of-Amsterdams-Jews>.

17. Edgar Samuel, “The Jewish Ancestry of Velasquez,” *Jewish Historical Studies* 35 (1996-1998), 27–32.

18. See “Diego Velázquez,” *The National Gallery*, accessed May 5, 2016, <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/artists/diego-velazquez>.

19. Madlyn Millner Kahr, “Velázquez and *Las Meninas*,” *Art Bulletin* 57, no. 2 (1975), 225-246.

spiritual contribution. Early on, he developed compassion for the exploited, and positive portrayals of peasants formed a major part of his paintings.”<sup>20</sup>

Last, there was the Italian artist, Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920), who was known for his language of nostalgia. Born in Italy in the Livorno ghetto, Modigliani was a descendant of Portuguese Jews who traced their lineage back to the philosopher, Benedict Baruch Spinoza. Modigliani was extremely proud of his Jewish heritage, and his “subjective and expressive art revealed his basic dignity, his despair, and a feeling of haunting melancholy.”<sup>21</sup> This melancholy has previously constituted the basis for the suggestion that Modigliani was a painter of *saudades*.<sup>22</sup>

As memory, melancholy, and *saudades* are among the base elements of converso art, *In Thy Tent I Dwell* brings attention to them through its material language. For instance, the fabric used for the outer parts of installation is cotton, and, because it is very thin, light passes through it effortlessly. The textile material becomes translucent when it is positioned against natural light, allowing one to see through it with ease. Under extreme light, the fabric assumes the aesthetics of a thin membrane, essentially turning into a light box. This light effect in the installation emphasizes the major theme of memory as the five lamps positioned within represent the improbable survival of the Mosaic<sup>23</sup>

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20. Ralph Shikes, *Pissaro: His Life and Work* (n.p.: Horizon Pr., 1980).

21. “The Misunderstood Death of Modigliani,” *The New York Times*, March 20, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/03/20/books/review/book-review-modigliani-by-meryle-secrest.html>.

22. “*Saudades*” is an untranslatable Portuguese word, often referred to as “a feeling of longing, melancholy, or nostalgia that is supposedly characteristic of the Portuguese or Brazilian temperament.” See *The Oxford Dictionaries*, v.s. “*Saudades*,” accessed May 5, 2016, [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american\\_english/saudade](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/us/definition/american_english/saudade).

23. The Mosaic traditions, the Mosaic Faith, and the covenant are defined as “Israel’s obligations, [which were] ascribed to Moses’ mediation. It is impossible to determine what rulings go back to Moses, but the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments, presented in chapter 20 of Exodus and chapter 5 of Deuteronomy, and the larger and smaller covenant codes in Exodus 20:22–23:33 and 34:11–26 are held by critics to contain early covenant law. From them the following features may be noted: the rules are formulated as God’s utterances—i.e., expressions of his sovereign will, directed toward and often explicitly addressed to the people at large, Moses merely conveying the sovereign’s message to his subjects—and, publication being of the essence of the rules, the people as a whole are held responsible for their observance.” See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, v.s. “Judaism,” accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Judaism>.

traditions in the 500-year-old Iberian Jewish Diaspora. The use of representations of light as elements in narratives of survival is not uncommon in the art world. For example, the Syrian artist, Issam Kourbaj (birth date?), speaks of the Syrian immigration crisis, using matches and light to mark the number of days since the beginning of the Syrian exile<sup>24</sup> in his tent installation, *Another Day Lost* (2015).

The translucence of the fabric in *In Thy Tent I Dwell* also points to another element: its delicateness. The fabric's dainty nature results in minor damage throughout its surface as it is handled. This damage, mostly made up of small rips and holes, is continually stitched and patched. That has become an essential part of the aesthetics of the piece. The constant stitching, patching, and fixing of the fabric pertains to the theme of coping with and understanding one's own shortcomings, unresolved history, traumas, and dilemmas. As I revisit each document, photo, forced conversion certificate, and immigration entry, I appreciate, concede, and adopt an important element of my history as an indispensable part of my consciousness.

Color also holds a prevalent place in this installation as the natural cotton fabric of *In Thy Tent I Dwell* exists mostly in variations of light beige. Some parts have been dyed a darker sepia tone, while others have smears of red and yellow. If one were to use the painter's color wheel for precision, the darker sepia tone of the fabric would be comparable to burnt sienna, the red would be comparable to alizarin crimson, and the yellow would be comparable to French yellow ocher. These colors are similar to those found in the underpainting preparation of classical oil paintings, most of which comprise warm tones. By using a palette akin to that of an underpainting, I allude to a major theme of this artwork, which is the observation of history in order to understand one's present by focusing on what is

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24. Kourbaj's installation is composed of "a tent... dozens of small items... and... matches." According to the artist, "[the] significance of the matches is the metaphor of creating the light of day and the dark of day... [bearing]... witness to the Syrian refugee crisis, [where] lives are on hold, ... and many are becoming citizens of a tent." See "An Art Installation Reflects on the Syrian Crisis and Extinguished Hopes," *The New York Times*, December 17, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/17/nyregion/an-art-installation-reflects-on-the-syrian-crisis-and-extinguished-hopes.html>.

underneath, beyond the façade.<sup>25</sup>

Besides the tones I describe above, the surface of the fabric tent includes three elements: pictorial materials, lines, and writings. The pictorial materials include hundreds of photo transfers and scanned images of my family members and their documents spanning from the 1600s (the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitional period) to the contemporary period. This appliquéing of personal information on a tent-like structure echoes similar works of art. For instance, an installation by Tracey Emin entitled *Everyone I have ever slept with – 1963-1995*<sup>26</sup> is an overly honest display of her sexual exploits, as well the names of family members whom she slept next to as a child. These kinds of displays makes both of our tent installations highly personal, somewhat voyeuristic, and the ideal symbols for more complex and political conversations (feminism in the case of Emin).

It is important to note that the photo transfers that constitute much of the installation are naturally aged and, therefore, are not uniform in color. I have made sure to keep the condition of each document unaltered. So the colors of these transfers are typical of papers that have browned with the passing of time. Some of the original documents and photos are considerably damaged due to deterioration over time, adding to the aged look of the textile. I simply could not change the colors or conditions of the photo transfers in any way: conceptually, their differences testify to the various nuances and complexities of the experiences they portray. In addition, perhaps in a more literal sense, this variety in color alludes to the various pigmentations of a family whose origins predominantly include North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Americas. This gives a much more human element to what would otherwise be a mere set of genealogical records.

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25. This is a theme which I first touched on in *Behind the Veil*, a 48 ft. by 42 ft., oil on canvas painting.

26. Tracey Emin's installation "was created by appliqueing everyone's names she had ever slept with, on the inside walls of a tent." See Chelsea Palmer, "Everyone I have ever slept with 1963-1995," *ChelseaPalmer BA HONS Fashion Design Topup* (blog), May 12, 2015, <https://chelseapalmer1212720.wordpress.com/2015/05/12/tracey-emin-everyone-i-have-ever-slept-with-1963-1995/>.

As for the writing on the textile, it is done in black fabric pen, black charcoal, and black pastel and is in my natural handwriting, which is cursive. It was important to write these testimonials by hand since many of the older documents (from the 1600s to the 1800s), featuring forced conversions, name changes, and marriages in absentia, were written by hand in cursive script. All of the documents were written during often-powerless individuals' experiences of duress. So it was important to present the testimonials of their descendants similarly. My hand-written testimonials uplift the thoughts, personalities, and humanity of those victims. Furthermore, I affirm that our memories and traditions are just as valuable as our official papers.

The above description of the fabric I used for *In Thy Tent I Dwell* does not characterize just one piece of textile but four separate walls measuring 10 ft. by 10 ft. each. Those four textile pieces hang on a metal structure, each one fully covering one of its distinct sides. Together, these panels assume the form, aesthetics, and function of a tent. Linking the walls is a roof structure made of thick, dark brown wool (raw umber in color according to the painter's color wheel). The tent-shape and materials suggest that this installation is a place of human habitation, which connects the artwork to the overall theme of existence within a Diaspora. Through the idea of living in a tent made up of one's current and ancient migratory documents, I suggest that the word "immigrant" is not limited to a residential status. Instead, one should view it as a form of identity, independent of one's relationship to a given address.

In essence, every specific document, photo, or hand-written testimonial on the fabric of the tent provides a limited glimpse into the intertwined immigrant and crypto-Judaic experiences. That is why the rips on the fabric are essential to the artwork. It is only through them that the inside of the installation is partially revealed.

One of the most important elements of *In thy Tent I Dwell* is a bed that rests inside the tent, with five similarly sized lamps<sup>27</sup> encircling it. The bed is small, low, and minimalist in nature, and it is made

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27. The five lamps standing around the bed within *In Thy Tent I Dwell* are no more than 2-ft. tall, varying in color between crimson and pink and slightly different in shape. They seem to be hand-painted, made of machine-carved wood, and their sockets are made of brass.

of metal. It is just large enough for a small adult (about 5.5 ft. long) and consists of a small curved headboard and a similar footboard. Moreover, it is flat black in color (akin to Mars black in the painter's color wheel). The mattress resting upon it is thin and covered with a white bedsheet and a thin blanket. A simple small pillow rests on top of the mattress, and, along with the bedsheet and blanket, it is white (titanium white). In essence, the bed serves as a reminder that crypto-Jewish individuals and families have rested humbly but comfortably over the course of their 500-year Diaspora. The five lamps encircling the bed symbolize this period (each one stands for one hundred years). The white bed sheets and pillow allude to the complete absolution of the *marranos* of the Inquisitional charges of heresy and apostasy. According to rabbinic responsa,<sup>28</sup> they are to be held blameless for their ancestors' forced conversions and, therefore, should be allowed to return fully<sup>29</sup> to the fold of Abraham.

Inside the tent, there is a wooden nightstand<sup>30</sup> behind the bed. It carries a lamp and a metal cup.<sup>31</sup> Diagonally across, there is a small, round, wooden stool, consisting of an unevenly hand-cut piece of wood on the top (its seat) and four simple wooden legs. This raw-umber stool stands low (no more than 2-ft. high) as it hints at the Jewish ritual of sitting *shiva*<sup>32</sup> (a religious ritual of mourning). On

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28. "Rabbinic responsa" refers to "the branch of rabbinical literature comprised of authoritative replies in letter form made by noted rabbis or Jewish scholars to questions sent to them concerning Jewish law." See *Random House Dictionary*, v.s. "Responsa," accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/responsa>.

29. The rabbinic responsa concerning the contemporary return of the descendants of *conversos* to Judaism may be viewed here (English version). See Chief Rabbi Mordechai Eliahu's Letter to Schulamit Halevi, "The return of the anusim to Judaism," accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.cs.tau.ac.il/~nachum/sch/sch/eli.txt>.

30. The small wooden nightstand behind the bed is about 2 ft. by 3 ft. tall. Although it looks professionally cut and assembled, it is old, scratched, and inelegant. Its color is that of dark natural wood, also comparable to raw umber in the painter's color wheel. On top of it rest one of the five lamps in of the tent.

31. The metal cup that rests on the nightstand (next to the lamp) behind the bed is made of aluminum, and it is the size of a large mug, able to hold about twelve ounces (350 ml) of liquid. It may also be used for cooking with boiling water as it is fire resistant. This fire-proof drinking vessel brings together two elements of the Portuguese-Jewish experience of 1497: the fires of the Inquisitional stake and their opposite, the baptismal waters of the forced conversions.

32. "Sitting *shiva*" is a term used to describe the action of Jewish mourners participating in the traditional rituals of observing a *shiva*. During the period of *shiva*, "mourners sometimes sit on low

top of this stool rests a small, old silver fan, which rotates and blows air constantly, giving the tent a breathing-like movement. By positioning this fan on top of the *shiva* stool, I suggest that the *conversos* choose to breathe, even through the perceived loss of their spiritual heritage, and they eventually adapt to this challenge in the most formidable of ways.

There are also two small identical pieces of luggage within the tent. They are yellow ocher in color, made of leather, and no more than 1.5 ft. by 1 ft. in size. One of the luggage pieces stands to the left of the bed (from an onlooker's point-of-view), while the other is a relevant prop used for a performance piece<sup>4</sup> that accompanies the installation. Indeed, the small piece of luggage next to the bed

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stools or boxes while they receive condolence calls. This is where the phrase sitting shiva comes from, and it is a practice that symbolizes the mourner being brought low following the loss of a loved one. For seven days, the family members of the deceased gather in one location – typically their own home or the home of the deceased – and mourns the loss in a variety of ways.” See “Sitting Shiva,” *Shiva Learning Center*, accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.shiva.com/learning-center/sitting-shiva>.

4 . The performance art element of *In Thy Tent I Dwell* proceeds as follows: everyday, for five days, at five o'clock (17:00), I come into the exhibit space where the installation is, holding a small brown leather briefcase (identical to the one inside the tent, next to the bed), and walk straight towards the tent. Upon reaching the tent, I visually acknowledge the installation by gazing left, right, up, and down. I then greet the art-piece by bowing my head down towards it and resting the briefcase on the floor (to my right). Next, I walk from left to right, lightly touching the fabric with my left hand, taking a few extra seconds to acknowledge the rips and holes on the surface of the textile. I circle the tent 5 times, each time picking up more speed, to the point that I am running by the fifth loop. The sounds of the footsteps play an important role, as they increase in intensity and loudness as I reach the fifth loop.

At this point, I stop in front of the briefcase, kneel before it, and open it with both hands, acknowledging each movement with brief pauses. As if I am engaged in a ceremony, while still kneeling on the floor, I reach within the briefcase and take a pair of white fabric gloves. I then put on the left glove first and the right glove second. Subsequently, I reach within the briefcase and take out a white, full-body length apron. I put on the apron while kneeling down and then reach within the briefcase for a thread and a needle. I put the thread through the eye of the needle then unroll a lengthy piece of thread and cut it.

Afterwards, I close the briefcase. I step forward with my right leg and stand up adjacent to the tent. I then turn to the left and look straight at the tent. At this point, I walk from right to left around the tent, acknowledging the rips and holes on its surface, and start hand-sewing some of the main damage on the fabric's surface. I do this slowly, carefully, and ceremonially, once or twice on each side. Once I am facing the front of the tent again, I bow down in respect, stand straight up, pick up the briefcase with my right hand, turn towards the doors, and walk away. I then stay outside for 5 minutes before reentering the room.

As one might surmise, there is much symbolism in this performance, mainly in the number five, as it is constantly referenced in the installation (i.e. in the number of lamps) and in the performance piece. Simply put, the number five in this artwork alludes to 500 years of trials in the

alludes to the constant migration of the *conversos*. They would swiftly flee from the Inquisition, wherever it followed them. The religious persecutions first occurred within the Iberian Peninsula but later followed them to the New World, only ending around 1834<sup>33</sup>.

The above descriptions only characterize a small part of the entire composition of *In Thy Tent I dwell*. For a larger itemized description of the installation (including detailed photos and a live video synopsis), please see the Appendix section of this paper.

In conclusion, artwork that speaks of Marrano heritage, even that which is based on heavy research and documentation, cannot simply narrate that heritage in a linear and practical manner (as most genealogy-based works would). That is because the crypto-Jewish experience is not only about family pedigree charts, documents showing various synagogue affiliations, or certificates of life-cycle rituals, such as those given at circumcisions, namings, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, and marriage ceremonies throughout the Jewish World. Rather, the *converso* experience is also one that ultimately relies on the hidden, on aspects that are always open for interpretation, that are eternally subjective, and that can only be read in between the lines.

Our marriage certificates, for instance, have been Catholic since the forced conversions, but they have often managed to be done in absentia. Our circumcision rituals are rare, but within the confines of the home, rituals for the dedication of newborn babies are common. We might not call

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Diaspora since the expulsion from Spain in the fifteenth century. At the same time, the number five carries strong connotations within Judaism, namely, as the total number of the books of Moses, and the five divisions of the book of Psalms. For this same reason, five is highly regarded as a symbol of Divine protection. Other emblematic elements of the performance are the gloves and the apron, which reference the Masonic affiliations of many Spanish-Portuguese Jews throughout the Diaspora (as was the case with most of the males in my family since the late 1700s). The gloves and apron constitute the Masonic wardrobe. On a different note, the gloves and the apron symbolize respect towards that which one aims to deal with. Here, that refers to heritage, identity, and history.

33. The Spanish Inquisition extended from 1478 to 1834 as a “judicial institution ostensibly established to combat heresy in Spain, [and] to consolidate power in the monarchy of the newly unified Spanish kingdom.” While the Inquisitional burnings and torture ended by the 1800s, the culture of persecution against what was perceived as heresy lasted much longer. See *Encyclopedia Britannica*, v.s. “Spanish Inquisition,” accessed May 5, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Spanish-Inquisition>.

ourselves Jews, but we often refer to others as “Gentiles.” It is only within these strange traditions that our private identities are exposed. *We* define ourselves as the *Gente da Nação* (the People of the Nation). Our endogamy, our strict dietary laws, and our clinging to a stringent culture of secrecy constitute the bulk of our collective identity. Our folklore is full of ancient wisdom, and our extreme caution against religious and civil oppression often define our social leanings. Within these confines, we have forged a safe existence, and that is the tent within which we gladly dwell.

Therefore, the easy malleability of the body in *In Thy Tent I Dwell* hints at our highly adaptable postures towards religion, immigration, and society. For, above all, the preservation of life remains the highest of our values. Thus, these flimsy fabrics, which move with every turn of the wind, signal our main motto: *dum spiro spero* (while I breathe, I hope).